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Fiction as History:

James Jones, *From Here to Eternity*

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A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of History

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in History

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by

Penny Marie Sonnenburg

May 2002

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Keywords: James Jones, Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, Handy Colony, World War II

## ABSTRACT

Fiction as History:

James Jones, *From Here to Eternity*

by

Penny Marie Sonnenburg

This study examines one of James Jones's novels, *From Here to Eternity*, as more than a fictionalization of historic events. Juxtaposing the correspondence between the author and his brother, begun when James Jones enlisted in 1939, and the novel allows an understanding of the extent that the novel was a distillation of Jones' personality and experience.

Jones felt fiction must be pieced from real experiences, but also contain original emotions disguised in the pages of a novel. Analyzing Jones's personal letters, interviews, and experiences offers, with some degree of certainty, the understanding that *From Here to Eternity* is more than merely a famous novel. It is an entertaining exposition of not only what military service does to men, but also what it emotionally did to James Jones. Thus this study reveals how much an author incorporates the essence of his historical experience—his "soul"—into his work.

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family who without their love and support, I would not have been able to survive this ordeal. My husband, John, and our three sons, Chris, Andy, and Philip, who have exhibited the utmost patience as I ranted, sometimes raved, and always bored them with the exciting research I was doing.

This is further dedicated to my in-laws, Robert and Barbara Sonnenburg, who never thought I was insane by pursuing any academic endeavor, even though I started so late in my life.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

But since he had been in the army, he had come to understand his ungraspable longing and his phantasmal and belly-shrinking dissatisfaction: there were such things he wanted to be, to do, to write: He wanted to be the voice that shrieked out the agony of frustration and lostness and despair and loneliness, that all men feel, yet cannot understand; the voice that rolled forth the booming, intoxicating laughter of men's joy; the voice that richly purred men's love of good hot food and spicy strong drink; men's love of thick, moist, pungent tobacco smoke on a full belly; men's love of woman: voluptuous, throaty voiced, silken-thighed, and sensual.

7 April 1941

Such views bring to mind an early creative writing class or a beginning author struggling to come to grips not only with himself, but also the world around him. This type of passionate writing also often appears in what we now consider to be classic literature. Another venue for such personal descriptive expository writing also appears in the homeward bound letters of the 1941 America's peacetime soldiers attempting to find an outlet for the world that they find themselves surrounded. These two paths appear to parallel in a closer scrutiny of James Jones's famous work, *From Here to Eternity*. This collision is revealing as readers, and especially historians, delve below the surface in their attempt to draw parallels between a writer and his work. Producing a novel of this magnitude was a cathartic experience for Jones as he distilled his personality and experience incorporating them into the characters in his work. While stationed in Hawaii, Jones wrote to Jeff, his brother, expressing the passion he felt about being a writer. As a clerk in the orderly room, Jones had ample time to try his hand at writing. James Jones is a historian's dream, especially for those of us who believe that not only are we what we read, but also what we write. When he was not writing, he was becoming thoroughly captivated with his reading of Thomas Wolfe. Of Wolfe's writing, he discovered that he wrote mostly "about the central character of a writer, himself. Altho it's fiction, it deals



with his life and experiences. In my opinion, little as it's worth, he is the greatest writer that has lived, Shakespeare included."<sup>1</sup> Jones applied his love of Shakespeare and adhered to the "great one's" advice of "Fool, look in thy own heart and write."<sup>2</sup> Later in a February 10, 1946, letter to Maxwell Perkins, the man destined to become Jones's editor, he expressed his desire to write a novel about America's peacetime army.<sup>3</sup> Scribner's approval began the writing process that when honorably discharged became what was considered Jones's best work, *From Here to Eternity*.

Readers do not have to be overly intelligent nor overly educated to question just how much the book contained Jones's personal army experience. This book has long been considered one of the finest war novels, but limiting it to just a "war novel" and refusing to look at Jones circumcises his writing and downplays his personal experiences. He did not intend it to be the classic story of war or combat, but used World War II as the backdrop he needed for his analysis of men, his ultimate goal. He wanted to examine and write about ordinary men's souls, emotions, and feelings during peacetime and conflict. He created what appeared to be fictional characters, but taking the advice of Perkins, he realized that "one can write nothing unless it is, in some sense, out of one's life—that is out of oneself."<sup>4</sup> We are shortchanged if we do not understand that while we are being entertained, we are also witnessing Jones's own experience in a myriad of men's faces. His writing was not only the desire to understand his own gender, but also the need to cleanse his soul of his own experiences. The majority of his writing was drawn directly from his experience, his family, and the people whom he came into contact with throughout his life.

He had found an outlet for the emotions he felt while serving in the peacetime army and he created a novel full of those emotions. Perhaps he felt that he was too complex, or limited, for simply one character, so several were created. *From Here to Eternity* introduces us to a multitude of characters such as Angelo Maggio, Nathan

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<sup>1</sup> James Jones to Jeff Jones. Letter dated 7 April 1941 as it appears in George Hendrick, editor, *To Reach Eternity: The Letters of James Jones*. (New York: Random House, 1989). George Hendrick gathered and compiled a multitude of the letters of James Jones which appear in this book. His minor, if any, editorial comments regarding these letters are not included in this thesis as the importance lies in the letters themselves. The footnotes contained in this thesis will state the author (usually James Jones), the person the letter was sent to, the date of the letter, and the page number of its appearance in Hendrick's book.

<sup>2</sup> James Jones to Mack Morriss, 12 November 1957. Original in possession of Capt. David Morriss, USN.

<sup>3</sup> Jones to Maxwell Perkins, 10 February 1946, p. 56.

Bloom, John Slade, and a dog. A closer look at the novel reveals its complexity as Jones struggled with the overwhelming aspect of writing.

Writing was an arduous process for him; he constantly wrote to Perkins discussing the writing technique books that had fascinated him. He never appeared to feel insecure about his writing, but felt that without knowing the technique, he would not ever be published. He often expressed that thought in many of his lengthy letters to Perkins. The one thing that he knew—other than he had to be a writer—was “whether I ever learn the form of technique: I can write with true emotion and perception and the right values of the things I’ve seen. Of course, that doesn’t do one a helluva lot of good if you’re not published, publishing is the end of writing after all.”<sup>5</sup> In the letter, he demonstrated not only how important writing was to him, but also that his writing was to have a purpose. “I don’t need to tell you: writing is my life, if I couldn’t write I don’t know where the hell I’d be. But writing without publishing is like eating without swallowing.”<sup>6</sup>

He admitted that he had “nothing to go on except certain people I knew in the army and what made them tick. There is no plot at all except what I create. I’m not even a character in the book, except in so far as I am every character.”<sup>7</sup> After he wrote to Perkins about reading Henry James’s, *The Art of the Novel*, and E. M. Forster’s, *Aspects of the Novel*, as well as several similar books, Perkins was quick to offer his own advice. As ever, Jones recognized the soundness and immediately took it to heart, writing to his editor “you are right about reading about writing while writing. I have stopped it and intend to stay stopped.”<sup>8</sup> An analysis of Jones’s letters to the people to whom he felt closest reveals the struggle he went through while creating these characters.

Whether a novel can be considered historical is a matter of continual debate. As Mark Carnes stated in his book, *Novel History*, readers envelope themselves in what they feel are imaginary plots, characters, and ultimately the stories that they reveal. They seek the entertainment that fiction provides at an elementary level usually unaware of any possibility that the story may contain more truth than their minds are capable of handling.

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<sup>4</sup> Maxwell Perkins to James Jones, 27 March 1946, p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> Jones to Maxwell Perkins, 16 March 1947, p. 89.

<sup>6</sup> Jones to Maxwell Perkins, 16 March 1947, p. 85.

<sup>7</sup> Jones to Maxwell Perkins, 16 March 1947, p. 85.

Therefore, the historical novel is “inescapably a contradiction in terms: a nonfictional fiction; a factual fantasy; a truthful deception.”<sup>9</sup> Jones exhibited the old adage that sometimes “truth is stranger than fiction.” He gave readers an entertaining account of peacetime Hawaii, while forcing them not only to come to grips with how war affects men, including himself. He often felt that “it ought to be a universal requirement of all writing, as ironbound a requirement as a plot, that every character should be handled with sympathetic understanding—even the worst son of a bitch—because it is in him.”<sup>10</sup> His constant worry the plot of the novel would take the life out of the story was abated as he allowed the events forming his characters’ individual experiences establish the plot—much as real life generally does. Jones’s scheming appeared in the story the novel tells. We are given a hint to seek the parallel between author and his characters in the opening page of *From Here to Eternity*, and then he leaves us to our own devices to find “him” in the novel. We have a headstart in our search, as he so aptly dedicates a snippet of a Rudyard Kipling poem to the United States Army:

I have eaten your bread and salt.  
I have drunk your water and wine.  
The deaths ye died I have watched beside,  
And the lives ye led were mine.<sup>11</sup>

The use of Jones’s letters as well as the secondary works written about his writing provide the luggage one needs to embark on a journey from eternity to here. With such a close scrutiny, one cannot help but feel that somewhere, somehow, James Jones would be pleased that someone finally got it and it was worth all of his struggling to expose what he felt was the “truth.” He always felt that he had been “struggling too hard to convince the reader that this is really true, really it is.”<sup>12</sup> Hopefully, after the end of this journey, he will not be disappointed.

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<sup>8</sup> Jones to Maxwell Perkins, 9 April 1947, p. 90.

<sup>9</sup> Mark C. Carnes, *Novel History*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998, p. 14

<sup>10</sup> Jones to Maxwell Perkins, 1 August 1946, p. 75.

<sup>11</sup> James Jones, *From Here to Eternity*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1998, front matter.

<sup>12</sup> Jones to Perkins, 1 August 1946, p. 75.

## CHAPTER 2

### JAMES JONES—THE NONFICTIONAL CHARACTER<sup>13</sup>

I don't know if you remember me or not. I am your nephew, Jim. I'm sorry I haven't written to you before now but I've been too darn busy. I carry papers in the morning and then go to school to work on my lessons. After school I play football till it's dark. When I get home I'm pretty sleepy.<sup>14</sup>

Robinson, Illinois is located on the eastern edge of the state and still prides itself on being the birthplace of James Jones; that, in combination with the fact that oil was also discovered on the Jones's family farm, made Jones's family one of the community's most prominent residents. James Ramon Jones was born on November 6, 1921, to a prominent family in Robinson. The social status that often accompanies prominence was not long enough lived to affect Jones himself but was instead the leveling factor that he later brought to his writing. As with most families in the Midwest, the depression took its toll on the Jones family. Grandfather Jones, who had invested heavily in Insull stock, literally saw his fortune disappear. This loss of social status affected both of Jones's parents albeit in different ways. Excessive drinking was the avenue that Dr. Jones (a dentist in Robinson) sought and Mrs. Jones, a diabetic and grossly overweight (having lost her youthful beauty prior to childbirth), embraced the Christian Scientist religion as her companion. These two avenues of escape later provided Jones with characters indicative of these traits. As he progressed as a writer, he constantly heeded Perkin's advice and wrote from his own personal experiences, even the lackluster ones.<sup>15</sup>

As he wrote to his aunt and uncle, Jones had an active childhood with very little time to join any organized team sports. He later deals with the side of competitive sports, which he viewed from the sidelines, in *From Here to Eternity*. High school consisted of a very unsystematic passion for reading as well as excelling in freshman and junior English courses. Bantering with his brother, Jeff, allowed both of them to exchange story

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<sup>13</sup> Frank MacShane, *Into Eternity: The Life of James Jones, American Writer*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985, pp. 3-20.

<sup>14</sup> James Jones to Mr. And Mrs. Guy Haish, November 23, 1932 cited in George Garrett's *James Jones*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers, 1984, p. 14.

<sup>15</sup> The second book that Jones published in 1957, *Some Came Running*, used his experiences from Robinson, some of the details that alienated him from the community. Even though the book was heavily attacked by the critics, he always felt that it was his best writing.

ideas, but there is no indication at that time that he desired to be a writer. Lack of funds for college left him with few choices; his father's suggestion that he join the Army was taken very lightly. Dr. Jones had served in World War I and remembered it very sentimentally, a trait that later influenced Jones to avoid sentimentality in his depiction of the army.

James Jones's young adult life closely paralleled what could be considered typical of the men of his time. The Depression ended any hope that he might have had of going to college, much as did many of his peers. He eventually was convinced to join the service but did not until he sowed a few more wild oats. He spent the summer of 1939 in Findlay, Ohio with his brother, his brother's wife and their small son. Employed as a construction worker, he saved enough money to have the privilege to strike out and go on the bum. War was beginning in Europe and being aware of Ernest Hemingway's World War I service in the Italian Army, he ventured to Canada. His fascination with serving under a foreign flag prompted him to attempt joining the Canadian Army, but ultimately he was turned down. He temporarily cast aside his hitchhiking days, returned to Robinson and on November 10, 1939, enlisted in the Army Air Corps. Thus began the journey that shaped James Jones and created the writer that he was to become.

Jones was quick to begin correspondence with his brother, one that continued throughout his entire life. The bantering evolved into a mutual sharing of ideas and emotions. The brothers dealt with not only the death of both parents, but also the death of a sister. These events ultimately became the "thing" to write about as Jones continued to write after *From Here to Eternity* was published. His first letter to his brother, dated less than a month from the time he enlisted, illustrates the personality and passion of a writer. The snowball effect is underway as his first words to his brother was based on observation that the men around him "gave me a good idea for our book. I don't know if I can explain it or not. It hinges on the attitude those guys in the clap ward have toward themselves and the disease. It's all a big joke to them."<sup>16</sup> The journey into Jones's life as a serviceman included all the thoughts and passions that eventually had to have an outlet. As his letter outlines a rough plot and basic scenario, he envisioned a man who "in desperation...joins the army, hoping to make it his profession. His sensitive nature can't

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<sup>16</sup> Jones to Jeff Jones, early December 1939, p. 3.

stand being herded around like cattle; treated like scum; being ridden by the non-coms. He serves his enlistment and goes out on the bum again. After trying to get settled, with less luck than before, he finally enlists again.”<sup>17</sup> It is not surprising that one can recognize these first thoughts providing the strong foundation for *From Here to Eternity*.

Jones did not begin seriously writing until he was honorably discharged in July 1944. His first work, “They Shall Inherit the Laughter,” was never published. He felt the limitations that all beginning writers have, or at least should have, and was constantly searching for the authority that he felt he needed. His aunt Sadie came to the rescue by introducing him to Lowney Handy, the most unconventional woman in Robinson. She was also a writer, but was never published. She recognized Jones’ potential as a writer and was most interested in helping him. Mrs. Handy was the first of many authorities whom he sought out for confirmation of his abilities. Feeling the need for additional education prompted him to enroll in New York University, and while there, he submitted “Laughter” (novel he began while still in the Army) to Maxwell Perkins at Scribner’s. Perkins filled any authority gaps that Mrs. Handy was incapable of. Ultimately, however, despite multiple revisions, Perkins was not satisfied. He was more interested in Jones’s proposal to write a novel about the peacetime Army. Hence, one begins the journey into *Eternity’s* process, which unfortunately Perkins did not live to see to fruition. Jones was quick to find another Scribner’s editor, Burroughs Mitchell, who was to become the editor of most of his major works.

When published in 1951, *Eternity’s* reviews were remarkable. The *Los Angeles Times* noted: “James Jones has written a tremendously compelling and compassionate story. The scope covers the full range of the human condition, man’s fate and man’s hope. It is a tribute to human dignity.”<sup>18</sup> Human dignity aside, it is time for one to progress and begin the journey into Jones ultimate belief as he expressed in a 1975 sketch. According to Jones’s inscription, “old soldiers never die. They write novels.”<sup>19</sup> With this observation, one can not only understand the passion that he put in all his work, but also share in his struggle of discerning when the “real” Jones ended and the fictional character took over. This intertwining of an author’s soul and a fictional character’s

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<sup>17</sup> Jones to Jeff Jones, early December 1939, p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Quoted in George Hendrick, *To Reach Eternity: The Letters of James Jones*, p. xxv.

<sup>19</sup> George Garrett. *James Jones*, p. 13.

enigma is at the heart of literature. It is a social phenomenon that often times classic literature illustrates the blandness of a historic event. Jones became not only an entertaining writer, but was also one of the “real” players in his work. He was one of those who were there; luckily for a while he kept a small notebook of his emotions and observations, as well as events. Readers, fortunately, are allowed to “touch the soul” of a major historic event.

In Jones’s attempt at touching the soul of a historic event, he employed an extremely unconventional style of writing. Some of the kinder critics intimated that his basic problem stemmed from a basic ignorance of modern writing techniques. Other critics felt that realism was outdated and no longer resembled reality. They further believed that Jones could not master standard English and more analysis, as well as attention, was given to his latest grammatical mistakes. These reviewers included, but were not limited to, the various *Time* men and Geoffrey Wolff of *Newsweek*. Steven Carter’s Ph.D. dissertation on Jones attempted to downplay the hostility about his writing style. While it may be true that he may be somewhat redundant and used far too much space in his fiction, Carter felt that they had “blown this issue all out of proportion.”<sup>20</sup> With the exception of a few critics, “most of the contemporary reviewers deemed the style of *From Here to Eternity* appropriate to its subject and even heaped praise on the authenticity and imaginativeness of the dialogue.”<sup>21</sup>

While these attacks have to be addressed, for this particular study they provide little more than becoming an expression of a critic’s personal opinion. This study of how closely Jones’s actual experience paralleled his work cannot take place without being cognizant of his unique style, and the lambasting that it took. By overemphasizing, dissecting, and judging a writer’s style, readers might miss the true meaning and importance of his work. Carter reaffirmed this belief in his dissertation:

This universal outrage proved a bonanza for lazy reviewers of Jones’s subsequent efforts since they no longer had to probe his books for meaning by could get by with hunting up a few choice specimens of his grammatical errors. After all, the entire fate of Culture was at stake every time he said “aint,” wasn’t it? Moreover how could literature ever survive his refusal to use the apostrophe properly?<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Steven R. Carter, “James Jones, An American Master: A Study of his Mystical, Philosophical, Social and Artistic Views,” Ph.D. dissertation, (Columbus: Ohio State University, 1975), p. 8.

<sup>21</sup> Carter, “An American Master,” p. 8.

<sup>22</sup> Carter, “An American Master,” p. 4.

This study takes into account these critics, but the choice is to leave Jones's writing in its true form. Therefore, misspellings are not corrected and apostrophes have not been added. The obscenities have also been left intact with an unspoken agreement with critics the likes of Harold Gardiner, S.J., and an anonymous *America* reviewer, who "cried out against the obscenities, but they mainly felt that it was a shame that soldiers talked that way."<sup>23</sup>

While it may have been a shame that they did talk that way, it is not a shame that Jones stayed true to form by putting them in his fiction. After all, not only are the soldiers taken into account, but more importantly the world that also surrounded Jones. His absorption with the world around appeared then as well as later. As a tourist, he returned to Hawaii and retraced some of his old haunts. Fiction and history appeared as one as he related:

I had once marched up to Kolekole alone—twice; two times—with a full field pack and an escorting noncom, over some stupid argument with my company commander. I had used the incident on Prewitt in the novel, and it had been reproduced in the film version. Now I no longer knew whether Prewitt had done it, or I had.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Carter, "An American Master," p. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Jones, "Hawaiian Recall," *Harpers* 248 (February 1974), p. 28.



## CHAPTER 3

### THE BIT PLAYERS—MAGGIO, BLOOM, SLADE AND A DOG

Leave me give you a tip, friend. Theys a war goin on here. And I can tell you who will win the friggin thing. If you're smart you'll learn to jockstrap, and learn quick, and get on the gravytrain, if you want to be a successful soljer.<sup>25</sup>

Words of wisdom poured from Angelo Maggio, the small, curly-headed Italian, ex-shipping clerk at Gimbel's basement, upon first meeting Robert Prewitt, the newly arrived, but not raw, transfer to the Company. Throughout the years that Jones's was constantly struggling with the difficult task of becoming a writer, he often referred to notes he frequently made as he attempted not only to absorb the world around him, but also his attempts at understanding it. He felt that his only other attempt at writing, "They Shall Inherit the Laughter," was effortless when compared to this new venture. He was spurred on by his fear of unknown territory and was keenly aware of his limitations. The ease at which "Laughter" was written may have been the explanation for why it was never published in his lifetime. "Laughter" was extremely autobiographical with its vital readymade plot and characters. These two elements allowed Jones to make use of his imagination and elaborate on the characters. *From Here to Eternity* fulfilled the desire that he felt that "someone should write a real combat novel, telling the complete truth, or as near the complete truth as a writer can ever approach." He admitted to Maxwell Perkins that while he was making notes on certain types of characters that he had found in the army, he also wanted to "inject the true reason why a man becomes like that: social forces which bottleneck and dam up his natural energies rather than giving them a channel in which their tremendous powers of energy and work may be useful."<sup>26</sup>

Jones's use of an Italian to express his true feelings about the army was not intended to come from any bigoted predisposition. Jones refers to many characters according to their ethnic origins. He justifies this in his own German background and felt that he seemed "to be cursed with the German mania for cataloging everything and having it in its little niche. Only trouble is, there aint that many niches."<sup>27</sup> Maggio provided the voice that allowed him to illustrate his belief of incorporating honesty in his

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<sup>25</sup> Jones, *From Here to Eternity*. New York: Random House, Inc., reprint 1998, p 40.

<sup>26</sup> Jones to Maxwell Perkins, 10 February 1946, p 55.

<sup>27</sup> Jones to Maxwell Perkins, 9 April 1946, p. 61.

work. He had two basic ways of looking at life: outwardly vicarious through the people around him or inwardly with his own soul searching. The fiesty Italian's words of wisdom are reminiscent of the actual encouragement and suggestion that Jones gave to Everest Capra, a friend he had made at Hickam Field. The pair often visited Schofield Barracks to watch the boxing matches, called smokers, which were held between company and regimental units.<sup>28</sup> They volunteered to represent Wheeler Field and climbed into the ring. Capra was the first and he was immediately knocked down. Jones climbed in next and managed to last one and half rounds before he also landed on the canvas. This experience provided more than just the realization that they were not destined to be boxers. For Jones, he learned the true difference between the infantry and the air corps that later prompted his desire to transfer. Further he realized that the army gave special treatment to boxers and athletes, treating them as primadonnas. Not only their pay, but the promotions and privileges were based on their athletic ability.<sup>29</sup> This formed another layer of the caste-ridden army that Jones abhorred. If anything, the athletes were on the top rung, possibly just below commissioned officers. Fortunately for Jones, his lack of athletic prowess led down other avenues, all strewn with the spirit of "real" people that he used in the creation of *From Here to Eternity*.

It is not surprising that there was a "real life" Maggio, but one that was alleged to be more non-fictional than he was presented. This allegation resulted in a lawsuit that Jones eventually won. Jones was totally serious when he informed Perkins of his intention to write about "certain people" he actually knew in the army. "There was no denying that he had used the real Maggio for a model, as he very often used real people as models for his fictional characters."<sup>30</sup> Jones apparently forgot to "change the name, in order to protect the innocent" but instead altered Maggio's actual life and his personality. He elaborated that he did not attempt to portray his real life or even his real personality but readily admitted that he "did describe him pretty much physically as he was then."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> K. S. Vandergrift, "Schofield Fights on Tap Tonight," *The Honolulu Advertiser*, 4 January 1941.

<sup>29</sup> Frank MacShane, *Into Eternity: The Life of James Jones, American Writer*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985, p. 26.

<sup>30</sup> Garrett, *James Jones*, p. 108.

<sup>31</sup> Jones to Horace Manges (attorney), 8 March 1954, as cited in Garrett's, *James Jones*, p. 108.

Jones felt that he had created a more enlarged, purer character than that of the “real” man he knew. This was not indicative of malice as Jones thought that the “real” Maggio was dead. This was confirmed in a letter to Mitchell where Jones mentioned running into an old buddy from F Company. This chance meeting allowed Jones to catch up on people and things happening. His buddy said “he heard Maggio got killed,” Jones writes, “at Munda, New Georgia.”<sup>32</sup>

Maggio is just one of the many characters who are so physically described so that readers might literally recognize them on sight. Maggio, as he sits in KP peeling potatoes, is the perfect physical size of the underdog. While Jones provided a description of someone he knew, he also injected his own personality and a pinch of his own physical characteristics. Jones, himself, was physically also a small man and the army required him to find tools for his simple survival.

In the Army, inevitably, he had had to learn to refine the craft and guile of the child in order to endure as painlessly as possible. And this sense of a necessary and deliberate duplicity was intensified by his consciousness—a *self-consciousness*, exaggerated but nonetheless real as the pain of a toothache—that, as he had been a small child, so he was a small man in a world of larger, stronger men.<sup>33</sup>

Jones cultivated a cocky, athletic swagger so that people remembered him as a larger man and referred to him as “a big guy. It was more a matter of spirit than of flesh.”<sup>34</sup> Maggio took on this cocky, athletic swagger that made the soldiers around him feel that he was larger than he appeared.

Jones bristled under the treatment he received as a new recruit. As he lamented to his brother:

I, who am better bred than any of these moronic sergeants, am ordered around by them as if I were a robot, constructed to do their bidding. But I can see their point of view. Nine out of every ten men in the army have not more brains than a three year old. The only way they can learn the manual and the drill commands is by constant repetitions. It is pounded into their skulls until it is enveloped by the subconscious mind. The tenth man cannot be excepted. He must be treated the same as the others, even if in time he becomes like them.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jones to Burroughs Mitchell, 23 September 1949, as cited in Garrett’s, *James Jones*, p. 109.

<sup>33</sup> Garrett, *James Jones*, p. 78.

<sup>34</sup> Garrett, *James Jones*, p. 78-79.

<sup>35</sup> Jones letter to Jeff Jones, early December 1939, p. 6.

This frustration at becoming a non-entity is cleverly inserted into the sarcastic optimism shown in Maggio's conversation with Prewitt. "“Wonderful day, ain't it?” the KP, a tiny curly-headed Italian with narrow bony shoulders jutting from his undershirt said to him.’ Maggio's factitiousness shines through as he upon introduction he claims that although he is not a jockstrap, he is a premium spudpeeler. “I'm one helluva hotshot spudpeeler. I'm the best spudpeeler in Schofield Barricks, I got a medal.”<sup>36</sup> As with any author who attempts to inject a truth into his writing, Jones instilling Maggio with brutal sarcasm is not accidental. He felt very adamant about his devotion to writing and confides to Perkins this strong desire to write and reach to the truth of life. Perkins had advised him to put aside the technique, plot, and other literary aspects. He wanted Jones to just “let it come out willy-nilly.” Jones appeared to accept some advice, with one exception, “I am learning to say these things indirectly and in action, instead of telling them showing them,” he wrote. “It seems to me, altho rather hazily, that if you as the writer retain something that you do not say, no matter what, and then write the rest in action and conversation, there is an element of emotion that you catch that you never get any other time.”<sup>37</sup> Jones projects his own feeling into Maggio's conversation and allows his own discontent to appear. As Maggio apologizes to Prewitt and downplays his sarcasm in the simple, “don't mind me, friend. I'm just bitter,” one clearly sees Jones's feelings coming to the surface as he intended.<sup>38</sup>

Jones is true not only to his personal history but also to basic historic facts woven into the novel's narrative. Maggio, while being observant, also introduces an aspect of a soldier's life. While trying to convince Prewitt to later join him in a two-handed poker game, he inspected the “fresh dark spots on Prew's sleeves where his stripes had been. ‘Wait'll you begin to draw your twenty-one a month, brother.’”<sup>39</sup> This provides an insight that Prewitt had been busted down to a new recruit, the same way that Jones was when he managed to get his transfer to Schofield. Frank MacShane's work, *Into Eternity: The Life of James Jones, American Writer*, enlightens that “in the evenings, the

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<sup>36</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 38.

<sup>37</sup> Jones to Maxwell Perkins, 23 June 1947, p.93.

<sup>38</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 40.

<sup>39</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 40.

men were free to go into town, but with a salary of \$21 a month, they made only infrequent trips to Honolulu.”<sup>40</sup>

The parallels continued, as fictional Maggio, having lost his money playing cards, shares with Prewitt a special photo album. Even though Prewitt had seen it many times before, Jones specifically uses this scene, even though he did not own a photo album, to elaborate on his own personal feelings. As Prewitt watches the Italian Angelo get out the album,

a big and nearly completely filled one that he had seen a thousand times before and knew as well as he would have known his own if he had ever had one, but he never had because he did not believe in collecting photographs that were always posed and therefore never truthful, but that now he wished sometimes he had because even if they were not truthful, they would have shown him himself and all the places he had been and people he had known as they were then, bringing back truthful memories out of their untruthfulness, like this one of Angelo’s obviously did for him.<sup>41</sup>

Jones did keep a sparse collection of photographs, which as he stated, most of them were posed, reinforcing the untruthfulness that he felt most people exhibited. Many occasions and in many interviews allowed him to expound on his philosophical bent on human nature and how he felt our interactions were simply conspiratorial in nature. “The more I see of people,” he once told a visitor, “the more it seems that we all live by a conspiracy. We say, ‘I’ll believe your lies about you, if you’ll believe mine about me.’”<sup>42</sup>

The photo album is not an arbitrary feature of the narrative and not just inserted or elaborately detailed to occupy space in the novel. Jones did not have a problem with being garrulous, this was a further example of the feeling that writers are a product of what they read that continues on to the style that they write. The last two thirds of Angelo’s photo album allow the readers, many of whom have never had the luxury of visiting Hawaii, to form a mental picture of the buildings, which still exist despite the wear and tear that 50 plus years can exact on any structure. Jones’s narrative lets readers in on the inside joke of the deception that lies in pictures.

The last two-thirds of it devoted to Hawaii, the Army, and the tourists  
photographs of the Hawaii and the Army, two entirely different things, tourist  
photographs of Honolulu, the Mormon Temple, Waikiki Beach, the big Hotels

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<sup>40</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p. 30.

<sup>41</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 198.

<sup>42</sup> “From Eternity to Here.” *Newsweek* (13 January 1958), p. 89.

(Halekulani, Royal Hawaiian, Moana; that none of us had ever seen the insides of), Diamond Head, a tourist picture of Schofield that looked lovely enough to make you want to enlist for this happy land, pictures of quaint Wahiawa without the smells, all the places the tourists saw from the outside and thought were lovely and whose attitude these photographs reflected, but that we always saw from the inside (excepting of course: Halekulani, Royal Hawaiian, Moana; Lau Yee Chai's Ala Wai Inn) with an entirely different perspective, a perspective not recorded in any photographs since our photographs of the inside were always jokes; clean jokes: a guy with his helmet on grinning in the Company Street, or a guy in full field grinning at the bayonet on the rifle he was holding in the Long Guard Position, or even two or three guys holding beer bottles and their arms around each other's necks and elaborately crossed legs and grinning in front of a palm tree or the Chapel or the Bowling Bowl....<sup>43</sup>

but Jones, always wanting to tap into men's emotions and honest thoughts continued with this painstaking description continues to probe and expose the "real" photographs that recorded the

dirty jokes: like the series of the French-Hawaiian beauty from Big Sue's in Wahiawa, first in her dress, then in her undies, then in her pants, then in nothing, then in an embarrassing position, a strip tease five in all, one buck for the series of two bits apiece; or perhaps the biggest, grandest joke of all: the Company photograph, with the fond smiling Captain and all his grinning men; but always, always jokes, because all of us always grinned reflexively, instinctively, a joke, if a camera (or even a reporter) popped up anywhere within shouting distance, Prewitt thought, which is why nobody ever knows our inside perspective unless they've been there but always see us as Our Simple Boys, and that even if they tend to forget because there is nothing to remind them; and which is why I'm goddamned if I'll collect recorded jokes about things I do not feel like laughing at.<sup>44</sup>

Jones's overflowing, lengthy prose is indicative of the type of authors he had been exposed to, the likes of Faulkner, Hemingway, and Wolfe. It is not unusual for a beginning writer to emulate the styles that he has read, but another perspective can be seen in the importance of this long diatribe on such a seemingly insignificant thing. It is likely that Jones felt so emotional about the photographic dishonesty, as well as the Hawaiian caste system with regard to soldiers that extended far beyond the realm of the army's caste system, that he responded in the only way he understood. He wrote about it under the anonymity of fiction. He did have a picture of the company that served his

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<sup>43</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 199.

<sup>44</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 199.

purposes, which indicated the rational purpose of keeping up with the people he had known. His company photo reflected the “real” stuff with the inked in MIA, WIA, ..... across each man’s chest.<sup>45</sup>

Jones airs his frustration at the inbred caste system of the army as Bloom attains a Pfc rating not because he is a good soldier, but because he is a jockstrap. Once again, Maggio’s prediction of a jockstrap’s influence and importance come to the forefront, this time in an angry conversation with Prewitt. “Little Maggio, the gambler and ex-shipping clerk from Gimbel’s Basement, was particularly bitter and incensed.” Jones’s own feelings come through in that if I had knew,” he said to Prewitt, whose bunk was two beds from his own in Chief Choate’s squad, “if I had only knew what this man’s Army had been like. Of all the people in this outfit, they give that vacant Pfc to Bloom. Because he is a punchie.”<sup>46</sup> Much as the case with Maggio, dynamite comes in small packages and frustration and rage are not limited to size. Jones makes this point as readers are constantly reminded of a character’s physical size, characteristics, or ethnicity. Maggio is the little bulldog Italian, then an introduction to Bloom, the bull-like, more often than not insensitive, always arrogant Jew.

The four of them, silently looking, made a momentary still picture that was nowhere apparently dangerous. But Bloom, Prew thought later, was never one to take a backseat for very long, even to a photograph album, if he could help it. Probably he only did it to make known the fact the The Great Bloom had arrived on the scene, since no one had acknowledged it. But in doing what he did he made at least two, and maybe three, enemies that would never again be anything else but enemies. It was a thing Bloom was always doing.<sup>47</sup>

Enter center stage the ideal “son of a bitch” that Jones perceived as the “universal requirement of writing”—the sympathetic handling of every character—because they deserved to be recognized for who they were. One of Jones’s perceptions of the army was that these types of characters did exist and writing from the characters that he knew, it is not unusual that readers are exposed to them in his novel. On several levels, Bloom is a son of a bitch, simply by his own insensitivity and his actions. The simple moment of the

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<sup>45</sup> Garrett, *James Jones*, pp. 48-49.

<sup>46</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p 126.

<sup>47</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 201.

men looking at Maggio's photo album became a volatile one whenever Bloom entered the picture.

Man, I bet that one's a hotshot piece of ass to lay," and laughed complacently at his own great wit. "Prew, who had not known he was there and who knew the girl was Maggio's sister, and what's more, knew that Bloom knew this because they all had seen the album many times, felt a chill of momentarily time-stopping shock run down through him. Then a red running of fire of hatred, half shame for Bloom, half rage for Bloom, who had done this deliberately, whether kiddingly or not certainly stupidly, but probably kiddingly in his bull-like patronizing, dominating way, but even kiddingly with a deliberate degrading maliciousness, trampling callously over one of the few respected tabus, the things nobody ever said to anybody else, even in the Army, the fire of hatred making him want to beat the living piss out of such stupidity.<sup>48</sup>

Again, Jones uses a character to portray the composition and variety of the "real" men in the army that he knew.

Jones's explanation of that type of character appears later as Prewitt attempts to explain why he saved Bloom's dog. Soldiers who felt, much as Bloom often did, that everything was a big joke tormented Bloom's little terrier mongrel. This mongrel, Lady, was quite possibly the only friend that Bloom had in the whole company. He had adopted her even though there were quite a few stray dogs that often cruised around Schofield Barracks. When Prewitt breaks up the torture that had gathered quite a crowd, his reasoning was "because I don't like to see a man be any more of a son of a bitch than he just naturally is."<sup>49</sup> Even later when Bloom attempts to thank him for taking care of his dog, Prewitt dismisses him by saying that he would have done the same thing for any "dawg" and then lies by saying that he did not know it was Bloom's dog. Jones—through Prewitt—reinforces not only the sympathetic treatment of stupid, mean people, but also by lying strengthened his adage of how people have an unspoken agreement to believe each others lies. According to Jones, this was mutual agreement extended beyond individuals, but also society; therefore, the army was considered his society at the time.

Jones's sympathetic handling of Bloom stems not only from the ideas that he for his writing but also a refocusing of his own sadness while in the army. This sadness is

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<sup>48</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 201.

<sup>49</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 483.



transferred to a fictional character and contained a difference that separated it from his personal sadness. He wrote to his brother that the sadness that he felt about soldiers was different where “I can turn the latter [a soldier’s sadness] on & off like a water spigot, & it’s a pleasant sadness because it’s impersonal & all twisted up with my wanting to write about people.”<sup>50</sup> Jones chose to have Bloom try to do everything he could by adapting in order to be accepted into the hierarchy of the army. His sympathetic handling of this “son of a bitch” allowed readers to have a small part of their being that felt that Bloom was not all bad.

He had done it all, a lot of things he did not like, because he thought he could change it and prove it did not matter. When he had seen how fighters were respected in the Company, he had become a fighter. Did they think he liked being a fighter? When he had seen how noncoms were looked up to and liked, he had become a noncom. Did they think he wanted to be a noncom? He had worked hard at it. When he saw that Regimental and Division champions were admired even more than ordinary fighters he had set his sight on that—and in less than a year achieved half of it and well on his way to achieving the other half. When he saw that the higher the noncom the more he was venerated, he determined to gain that too. He was not going to leave one single loophole they could turn to for escape. It wasn’t easy; what he done was not handed to anybody on a silver platter. But he had stuck to it; because he meant to make them like him, meant to prove beyond the shadow of a doubt to them that there were no such things as Jews.<sup>51</sup>

Robinson, the small town in Illinois, had the possibility as being just as cruel to its own people. With Jones’s description of Bloom, one can transpose some of the feelings that a fictional character in a novel has to a “real” person. Jones could have quite possibly been attempting to come to grips with the feelings that his own father had, which ultimately led to the same finale—suicide.

Jones’s dad exhibited the same characteristics that Bloom went through in the novel. It is not unusual that *From Here to Eternity* was Jones’ first literary attempt to cope with the suicide of his father, Ramon Jones. The parallels that an author draws between life and its emulation in fiction become apparent in a letter to his brother where he observed that “in that last split second before the blackness hit him, he probably

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<sup>50</sup> Jones to Jeff Jones, 19 February 1943, p.29.

<sup>51</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 563.

grinned and told himself what a Goddam fool he is.”<sup>52</sup> Essentially readers are hopeful that Bloom felt the same way in his final thoughts of “I dint mean it! He tried to yell. I take it back! I was only kidding! I was just showing off!”<sup>53</sup> But with Jones’s desire to understand people, one has to explore the common conditions that led not only his dad, but also the conditions—albeit fictional—that drove Bloom to end his life, ironically in the same manner and method.

Since Jones formed his characters from his own experience and history, then Joan Didion was correct in her simple observation of his writing. She felt that “James Jones had known a great simple truth: the Army was nothing less than life itself.”<sup>54</sup> If life had people who needed to be treated sympathetically, then an easy extension to the men in the army can be assumed. Therefore, Jones’s dad, Ramon, must have had some of the same feelings as the fictional character, Bloom. Jones wrote about his own history so from what has been gleaned from Jones’ background, one can see the adversity that his own father went through most of his life. Jones’s grandfather was sometimes a violent man constantly surrounded by gloom. On one occasion, he disliked the cake that was served so he threw it at the ceiling. After a bit, the stuck icing began to melt and drip down where his children watched in wonderment. “Despite such outbursts, George Jones took great pride in his family line and insisted that his sons [one of whom was Jones’s father, Ramon] live up to it. He had built up the family fortune and intended his four sons to be worthy of their inheritance. He wanted them to be professionals—two doctors and two lawyers—and he sent them off to Northwestern University for this purpose, forcing them to follow the careers he had chosen for them.” Ramon gained his father’s permission to study dentistry instead in order to finish school earlier and get married sooner. While he did not want to be a dentist, he complied with his father’s desire that all of his sons become professionals. With strong resentment of his father’s tyranny combined with the early death of his mother, Ramon attempted several emotional avenues of escape. He tried to write poetry, but tired of battling his father’s admonition. Finally, he found the

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<sup>52</sup> Steven R. Carter, *James Jones: An American Literary Orientalist Master*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998, p. 78.

<sup>53</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 568.

<sup>54</sup> Joan Didion, “The Coast: Good-bye, gentleman-ranker,” *Esquire* 88 (October 1977), p. 60.

outlet that sustained and comforted him up until his suicide, the easy road to alcoholism.<sup>55</sup>

Jones's recalled the atmosphere of his childhood home as one of "hot emotions and broiling recriminations covered with a thin but resilient skin of gentility."<sup>56</sup> His dad's frustrations at not fulfilling his own dreams in such a limited environment closely resembles Bloom's feelings of not fitting in to the army life, no matter how hard he tried. Bloom felt:

all his life he had tried to act, to do, to be strong and forceful enough to be able to point to something just once and say *I* did this, to just once commit one irrevocable act through his own willful motivation. And always, in the end, it was outside influences that governed him and he was blown by chance, by pure happenstance, coincidence, one way or the other, without having anything to say about it.<sup>57</sup>

It can be believed that Jones's father felt that he did not have anything to say about his own life either.

It is not unexpected that Ramon [Jones's dad] would turn to suicide as the only option to end the emotional pain. As Jones wrote to his brother, Jeff, "I have been expecting Dad to do that quite a while. I don't know why, call it a premonition if you will, but it didn't surprise me to hear that he had killed himself." He continued with a remembered conversation he had with his dad:

well, Jeoper [Jones's nickname], if the time ever comes, when I'm sucked clear under the muck up to my ears, and I know that the net profit isn't worth the cost, I wouldn't hesitate to kill myself. When a man can't see anything to gain in putting up with living, which at best, is a pretty dismal affair, the thing for him to do is get out. And don't ever let anybody tell you it takes more guts to go on living than to kill yourself, because it doesn't; and those who say it does say so because they know in their hearts that they'd never have the guts.<sup>58</sup>

Jones felt proud his father had the courage to die the way that he did, rather than hanging on because he was afraid to die. He understood that he was a weak willed man, but felt that was due to his background and the attitudes prevalent in a small town place like Robinson.

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<sup>55</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p 8.

<sup>56</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p. 9.

<sup>57</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 567.

<sup>58</sup> Jones to Jeff Jones, 22 March 1942, p. 18.

Call it premonition if you will, but the Schofield Barracks group witnessed Bloom's weakness firsthand as he resorts to homosexuality in an attempt to find acceptance within the army's constraints. He was one step ahead of Jones's dad as he had already found the drinking route, but the odds are good that he would face the same demise.

Prew looked over where Angelo was pointing. Bloom and Andy in slacks and gook shirts had just come in with five other men, none of whom Prew knew. The took a big table in a corner of the terrace, Bloom holding forth loudly, his big arms waving when he talked, him leaning tensely across the table toward another man. "Dear Bloom," Hal said. "He's dropping down the ladder rung by rung. I shouldn't be surprised if he committed suicide one day."<sup>59</sup>

Due to heavy financial losses, Jones saw his own family slip down which is why he was not surprised at his own father's suicide. With Bloom's circumstance, his suicide was not unexpected. It was something Jones had experience with and possibly remotely considered it himself. Almost a year before his father committed suicide, Jones wrote a very telling letter to his brother. The words are indeed prophetic as he writes, "I'm always full of that fear that maybe I'm not any good. Sometimes I get so damned low I feel like blowing my brains out. That's no shit, it's the straight dope."<sup>60</sup> One does not know whether Jones intended Bloom to resemble his father or himself; the only safe assumption that it was a "real" life episode in a writer's life. Readers, once introduced to Bloom, find John Slade to be a breath of fresh air with his enthusiasm and young idealist opinions. He definitely has a naïve view of the army and interjects a new perspective to the group.

"What'd they do?" Prew said, "screw you out of your rating?"

"Ahh," Slade said disgustedly. "They're nothing but a bunch of goddam civilians in uniforms. Why, hell when I got out recruit drill and they gave me my classification interview I—"

"Your what?" Prew said.

"My classification interview," Slade said, "I put in for armament school so I could be a gunner. So what do they do? They send me to clerical school at Wheeler Field and as soon as I graduate they put me in a regular goddam office. Desks, filing cabinets, and all." He looked at them indignantly.

"Oh," Prew said. "I see. And they cut you out of the rating that went with it, is that it?"

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<sup>59</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 372.

<sup>60</sup> Jones to Jeff Jones, 7 April 1941, p 11.

“Rating, hell,” Slade said with outrage, “I didnt stay long enough to get any rating, I quit and went on the guard. Hell, I could have stayed home in Illinois and worked in a goddam office, or mowed yards. Without having to enlist in the Army and come to Wahoo to do it.”<sup>61</sup>

John Slade, an Air Corps night sentry, did not let the mosquitoes, the two week field orders, on this occasion a sabotage problem at Hickam Field, or the fact that he was supposed to be walking post did not keep him from voicing his opinion to anyone that would listen. This character and his personality are the only complete embodiment of James Jones that appears in the novel. Slade was originally intended to be a larger character, as well as appear earlier in the novel.<sup>62</sup> Jones readily admitted that he incorporated his own experience in the army with the fictional Slade:

Actually, I myself was in the Air Corps to begin with, and it was from meeting a similar group of men while on guard (as occurs in the passage in the novel—and in which, in fact, is the only place that I myself appear at all in the book: as the young Air Corps private, Slade) that I finally decided to transfer to the Infantry—a rather unheard of thing to do then, when everybody else was trying to get out of every other branch into the Air Corps.<sup>63</sup>

In the same way that Maggio’s photo album allowed Jones the vehicle he needed to express his opinions, he needed John Slade to continued in the same vein and additionally expose another Jonesism, his love of jazz music. As Jones wrote to his brother with his long diatribe on the dangers of self-deception, he eventually found an outlet for his feelings. Slade is the perfect choice because he is not part of the “company” and is just the outsider who appears briefly, summarizes, enjoys the people, and then moves on. Jones thought that this non-heroic picture was “invariably the true picture that lies behind any such self-dramatization, self-deception, self-lies. And the more and greater the lies, the more unpleasant the true picture—and consequently the more we lie to ourselves trying to hide the true picture. That will be the picture of Slade in the novel.”<sup>64</sup>

The key feature in these two chapters is a friendly argument, possibly not unlike the ones that Jones had with his peers, particularly William Styron, Irwin Shaw, and

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<sup>61</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 440.

<sup>62</sup> Jones to Jeff Jones, December 1946, p. 84 note.

<sup>63</sup> Lee A. Burrell, Jr., “James Jones on Folklore and Ballad,” *College English* 21 (December 1959), p. 164.

<sup>64</sup> Jones to Jeff Jones, December 1946, p. 84.

Norman Mailer. Which was worse—the Air Corps or the Infantry? Perhaps an oral reading of this friendly argument encompassing two chapters would give readers a strong feeling that they were experiencing Jones, in the fictional character of Slade. He craftily created this character interjecting his personal background in Slade’s history, as well as his opinion about the Air Corps. Jones—at his father’s insistence—enlisted in the army. His romantic view of the military was soon shattered as he found out that he was not to become a pilot. There were many occasions that his eyesight endangered his early goals, but this did not affect his overwhelming desire to be a writer. At this period he became obsessed with Thomas Wolfe’s writing, and the identical jobs that both he and Slade had as clerks allowed him to express himself in print. Jones’s acted upon his desire to be transferred to the Infantry whereas readers never know whether Slade was able to do the same.<sup>65</sup> Slade’s enthusiasm is contagious and highly expressive of Jones’ beliefs as an enlisted man. It is Jones’s voice speaking in the guise of Slade’s tirade.

“The Infantry’s the backbone of the Army. The Air Corp, the Artillery, the Engineers—all they are for is to assist the Infantry. Because in the final analysis, it’s the Infantry that has to take the ground and hold it.” Nods of agreement provide fuel to the fire as he goes on. “They have to be soldiers in the Infantry,” Slade told them. “The Infantry hikes and fights all day, and then goes out and drinks and dances with the women all night, and then hikes and fights all day the next day.” The humor of this last idea causes Prew to inquire as to the source of Slade’s information. Slade pleads ignorance but guesses that he must of read it somewhere. “I used to read a lot when I was younger, in high school. But what the hell good does reading do you?” he demanded angrily. “The thing is to live, act, do. You read all your life and what have you got?”<sup>66</sup> This paralleled Jones’s own thoughts, but he took it one step further by his strong feeling that you also had to write about your experiences. Since Jones was a loner, it was easy to portray the enjoyment that the fictional Slade encountered with the infantry trio. Slade, expressing his obvious gratitude, told them that “You know, you guys dont know what it means to have gotten to talk to you fellows. I dont get to talk to fellows like you guys often that understand how a fellow feels.”<sup>67</sup> Jones, in his letters, often expressed his

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<sup>65</sup> Hendrick, *To Reach Eternity*, p. 9.

<sup>66</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, pp. 440-441.

<sup>67</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 442.

loneliness to his brother, who he felt was truly the only person he could confide his feelings. Once Jones was discharged from the Army and began work on *From Here to Eternity*, Maxwell Perkins assumed the role of his new confidant.

Slade's enthusiasm continues as he urges the trio to write the "Re-Enlistment Blues," something that they had never gotten around to composing. Jones uses not only the encouragement that Maxwell Perkins gave him, but also the advice that he offered him to organize his thoughts. It is not surprising then that when the trio's only excuse for not writing right then is because they don't have any paper, Slade conveniently has a notebook and pencil. This is an unusual thing for a soldier to have, but is easily explained because Slade says he "always carry them. To write down thoughts, you know."<sup>68</sup> Among the many pieces of advice that Perkins gave to Jones, one that he took seriously was the one about carrying a notebook. Perkins was right in that if "a writer did that for ten years, all those memories would come back to him...and he would have an immense fund to draw upon."<sup>69</sup> Jones—as well as Slade—apparently took this advice to heart. Slade's notebook contained the beginnings of a song, "The Re-Enlistment Blues."

Jones's love of jazz, and his admiration for Django Reinhardt, was incorporated into Slade's personality. A writer's style is often used for literary means, but Jones readily confessed to limiting his writing to what he knew or had experienced. So one has to look beyond the literature to justify devoting four pages of a novel to tell the story of a then little known jazz musician. Initially readers have to play the Jones game of "this is true, really it is" as the dialogue displays this honest emotion. Slade informed the trio that he was a blues collector that provoked an excited reaction, especially from Andy.

"You are?" Andy said. "Say listen," he said, forgetting to be bored, "have you ever heard of a guy named Dajango? Danjango Something."

"Sure," Slade said expansively. "Django Reinhardt. The French guitarman. You pronounce it Jango. The D is silent. He's the best."

"There!" Andy said to Prew. "You see? You thought I was lyin. You thought I was makin it up." He turned back to Slade excitedly. "You got any of this Django's records?"

"No," Slade said. "They're hard to get. All made in France. And very expensive. I've heard a lot of them though. Well what do you know." He said. "So you know old Django?"

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<sup>68</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 463.

<sup>69</sup> Hendrick, *To Reach Eternity*, p 61.

“Not personally,” Andy said. “I know his music. There’s nothing like it in the world.” He turned to Prew. “Thought I was kiddin you, dint you?” he said accusingly. “Thought I was only makin it all up. What do you think now?”<sup>70</sup>

An article written about Reinhardt attempted to show the connection between jazz, youth, and the German occupation during World War II. In the article’s introduction, Pelzer used *From Here to Eternity* to illustrate how Jones sought to explain the profound effect that this musician had not only in Europe, but on the peacetime army at Hawaii as well. The article merely uses the novel as an introduction to Reinhardt’s effect and then continues with the background of the musician.<sup>71</sup> What the article limits to a simple introduction, Jones supplied in the novel itself. Readers are given a musical history lesson, compliments of Andy, one of the trio. He tells his story of learning of Django and attempting to purchase his recordings, albeit to no avail. As part of Andy’s story goes,

They were all foreign recordings, those of this Django, all made in France or Switzerland. Andy had never heard of him before, and never heard of him again, until Slade. He tried, but the record clerks had never heard of Django, they did not handle foreign recordings, and Andy could not tell them his last name. Just that one night remained, a half-dream, half remembered, that he was not even sure any more was real. He had told and retold it so often, elaborating this or that, that he no longer knew where memory stopped and imagination started. He was glad to prove by Slade that it really had existed.<sup>72</sup>

With the usual Jones propensity to write about what he knew, readers are given further glimpses into the lives of the soldiers, via the vehicle of Slade, the character exhibiting most of Jones’s “real” personality.

The last of the bit players appears in the unlikely characterization of a dog. Unfortunately this dog does not have a name, so will simply have to be referred to as Colonel Delbert’s dog. As one is constantly reminded that Jones wrote from his own personal history as well as the things he witnessed around him, this character inclusion is not without merit. As MacShane attempted to describe Jones’s background, he provided details about the treatment Jones received under his mentally affected mother. MacShane told of how Jones’ mother employed unheard of childhood raising strategies. She would on occasion beat him with a broomstick. “Like most small boys, he was active and often

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<sup>70</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 460.

<sup>71</sup> John D. Pelzer. “Django, Jazz and the Nazis in Paris,” *History Today* October 2001 v 51, p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 462.



underfoot, which irritated his mother. When she had to cook or iron in the kitchen, she would take him out into the back yard, where she kept a chain to which he was attached so that she could go on with her work without him running away. This treatment naturally frightened and puzzled him.”<sup>73</sup> This was not something that a small boy was likely to forget and must have been a haunting memory that he carried with him even into his army days. In a postscript of a letter to his sister, he clearly stated, “I wish I was a dog. Dogs just eat and sleep an[d] bark.”<sup>74</sup> Jones apparently could not leave this memory or wish behind and spent a significant amount of prose on the apparent, and possibly envious position, that Colonel Delbert’s dog held. In snippets of dialogue that occur for over two pages of the novel, readers are given much more information than they need for an animal:

The Colonel’s goddamned dog was still boredly asleep, hind legs spread flat and belly to the floor, front legs crossed as nonchalantly as a male lead in morning trousers. Every officer in the Regiment had to coddle the little bastard.

This continued as Jones supplied readers with more than they bargained for:

That damned smug dog...Sleeping and eating and allowing himself to be coddled...Son of a bitching little fat dog with such a goddamned easy life.

As with Jones, enough is never enough, so he continued:

The wood noises woke the cocker and he rose and stretched himself, one leg at a time, unrolling his pink tongue in an insolent yawn. He licked his chops and stared at Holmes accusingly. Holmes stared back, lost in sudden thought, his hand still on the chair, enviously watching the sleek black wellfed arrogance stretch itself back out on the polished floor and resume its interrupted meditation.<sup>75</sup>

At this point it appeared that Jones had exhausted all of his feelings about the dog. The ultimate irony is that he felt that Colonel Delbert’s dog was also part of the caste system of the army, so one becomes even more aware that everything has its place.

The bit players appearing throughout the novel not only entertain readers, but also provide insight into Jones’s history and the importance of writing what he knew about, his own history, or what he had experienced. He had the added benefit of being able to

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<sup>73</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p. 10.

<sup>74</sup> Jones to Mary Ann Jones, 20 May 1942, p. 23.

<sup>75</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, pp. 58-59.

do so under the guise of fiction, which he admitted to his brother was really “his first love.”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Jones to Jeff Jones, 22 March 1942, p. 19.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE LEADING MEN—PREWITT AND WARDEN

This is the song of the men who have no place, played by a man who has never had a place, and can therefore play it. Listen to it. You know this song, remember? This is the song you close your ears to every night, so you can sleep. This is the song you drink five martinis every evening not to hear. This is the song of the Great Loneliness, that creeps in like the desert wind and dehydrates the soul. This is the song you'll listen to on the day you die. When you lay there in the bed and sweat it out, and know that all the doctors and nurses and weeping friends don't mean a thing and can't help you any, can't save you one small bitter taste of it, because you are the one that's dying and not them; when you wait for it to come and know that sleep will not evade it and martinis will not put it off and conversation will not circumvent it and hobbies will not help you to escape it; then you will hear this song and, remembering, recognize it. This song is Reality. Remember? Surely you remember?<sup>77</sup>

Robert E. Lee Prewitt and Jones both had a love/hate relationship with the army. As Taps reverberates across Schofield Barracks, Prewitt was doing what he loved, playing the bugle, a talent he acquired in the army. When he was young he had learned to play the guitar but Harlan County did not have much call for blues playing guitar because every young boy learned to chord a guitar even though they were so small that they had to hold it like a string bass. Jones based Prewitt on an old friend of his in the army, Robert Stewart. It is not surprising that Prewitt has the characteristics of someone whom Jones knew. One is constantly being forced to recognize that Jones was a man of his word, constantly sticking to writing about what or whom he knew. In his letter to Mack Morris he told him that sometimes people have a “psychological block of not wanting to look deeply enough into yourself to get at the very basic truth. One has to have a sort of peculiar compulsion, a certain masochism, to want—and need—to do that and then expose it in writing.”<sup>78</sup> By transforming the Stewart that Jones knew into the fictional Prewitt in *Eternity*, he had to dig deep into his own history and be compelled enough to write about it truthfully. He pictured a fearlessly proud character who would rather spend “six months on stockade rockpile rather than admit he was wrong and accept company punishment when he felt he was right in his actions.”<sup>79</sup> This intense pride was

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<sup>77</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 217.

<sup>78</sup> Jones to Mack Morris, 12 November 1957.

<sup>79</sup> Jones to Maxwell Perkins, 10 February 1946, p. 55.

born in the hills of Kentucky where the options were limited and joining “The Profession” appeared to be the only way of survival.

Robert E. Lee Prewitt had many things in common with his creator, Jones. Prewitt came from the Kentucky Mountains along the West Virginia line<sup>80</sup> while Jones came from the small town of Robinson, Illinois. Small towns exhibit traits based on the limited mindset that the occupants have, as anyone from a small town would most likely affirm. MacShane elaborates on how small town life affected Jones. “The intimacy of the provincial world in which he grew up made him see how emotional human relations really are. In the small towns of his youth, no theaters, museums, or concert halls existed to distract the human heart.”<sup>81</sup> Much like Jones knew that life existed outside of Robinson, Prewitt received most of his information from his Uncle John Turner, one of the few men who had been beyond the hills. “The tall man would squat on his hams in the little yard—the coal dirt was too thick on all the ground to sit—and in an abortive effort to dispel the taste of what the Encyclopedias all “Black Gold” he would tell them stories that proved conclusively that there was a world beyond the slag heaps and these trees whose leaves were always coated black.”<sup>82</sup> Jones and the fictional Prewitt both enlisted in the army after a period of time on the “bum.” Both joined to escape the throws of the depression, which always hit the small towns very hard. “The life the soldiers led produced a communal feeling among them and gave meaning to many whose lives had seem purposeless before they enlisted. Isolated from the mixed company of civilian life, they developed intense loyalties, for they all had the army in common.”<sup>83</sup> This commonality of experience existed between Jones and his fictional Prewitt.

Shortly after enlisting, Jones had a scare that being true to his own character, he later wrote about. During his stay at Fort Slocum, he discovered a discharge from his penis. Since he had had intercourse five weeks before he joined the army, he immediately went to the base hospital where he was mortified by the unconcerned way he was examined in addition to all the crude jokes that were made about venereal disease.<sup>84</sup> In a letter to his brother, he described the experience: “I had the chance to observe the

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<sup>80</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 15.

<sup>81</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p. 4.

<sup>82</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 16.

<sup>83</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p. 31.

men who had the ‘clap’ as it is called in the army, and it gave me a good idea for our book. I don’t know whether I can explain it or not. It hinges on the attitude those guys in the clap ward have toward themselves and the disease. It’s all a big joke to them.”<sup>85</sup> Even though Jones did not have the disease, he dealt with it in the novel. With Jones’s penchant for exposing the truth in his writing, it does not seem unusual that Prewitt not only got the “clap,” but this young boy from Harlan County received the disease from a society girl. One cannot miss the parallels between both Jones’s and Prewitt’s observation of the situation.

Unofficially, nobody really minded the clap. It was a joke to those who had never had it and to those who had been over it for a while. No worse than a bad cold, they said. Apparently the only time it was not a joke was when you had it. And instead of hurting your unofficial reputation it boosted you a notch, it was like getting a wound stripe. They said that in Nicaragua they used to give out Purple Hearts.

But officially it hurt your Service Record, and it automatically lost you your rating. On your papers it put a stigma on you. When he put in to get back in the Bugle Corps, he found that while he was away they had suddenly gone over-strength. He went back on straight duty for the rest of his enlistment.<sup>86</sup>

Straight duty assignment was to be another common ground between Jones and the character he created, Prewitt.

Jones requested a transfer from the air corps to the infantry because he considered it the more manly branch of the service. He often felt that the air corps “suffered from a feeling of inferiority compared to the infantry, cavalry, and artillery.”<sup>87</sup> While this may have been his basic reason, the true reason lay in the fact that he was told that he would not be a pilot and thus reduced to being a member of the support crew, which widened the distinction between those “who flew and those who remained on the ground.”<sup>88</sup> Prewitt suffered from the same demotion as he was passed over for the “top” bugler position in his previous company, something that made him promptly request a transfer. Both the real and the fictional characters were stripped of their pfc ratings, required to go

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<sup>84</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p. 23.

<sup>85</sup> Jones to Jeff Jones, early December 1939, p. 5.

<sup>86</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, pp. 20-21.

<sup>87</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p. 24.

<sup>88</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p. 24.

on straight duty, and had to go through basic training again assuming the status of mere recruits. Thus begins their time at Schofield Barracks.

While the Stewart person that Jones knew and transposed into the Prewitt character in the novel share the common experience of the stockade, Jones had a personal experience that he was able to expose by having Prewitt enact the same event. Jones remembered, “marching up the Kole Kole Pass in the Waianae Mountain Range ‘...with a full field pack and an escorting noncom, over some stupid argument with my company commander.’”<sup>89</sup> The event appeared larger than life as readers see Prewitt mouth off to the commander during a fatigue duty when he is singled out for not pulling his share of the load (which he felt he was). It begins innocently when Sergeant Ike Galovitch orders Prewitt to pick up the pace, and he responds within hearing distance of the Company Commander, Dynamite Holmes.

“Yas, what,” Prew sneered. “You want this job done so perfect and so fast why dont you grab a brush yourself? Instead of standing around giving orders nobody listens to.”

The men stopped mechanically washing and all stared at him, just as mechanically, and he looked at them, the rage filling him, now knowing why. He knew it was senseless, absolutely senseless, even dangerous, but for a moment he was wildly proud.

“Now listen,” Ike said, thinking hard. “This back talk you giving me do I not want. To work get back on the lip shut button.”

“Oh blow it out your ass,” he said savagely, still mechanically scrubbing with his rag. “I’m working. What do you think, I’m floggin my doggin?”

“What,” Ike gasped. “What.”

“AT EASE!” roared Capt Holmes, appearing at the door. “What the hell is all this racket, Prewitt?”

As with any action that disrupts the monotonous routine of fatigue duty, this causes pause as other noncommissioned officers gather to watch the incident. Prewitt will not let this go and informs Holmes he “never liked being pissed on, Sir. Even by a noncommissioned officer,” adding a twist to the phrase. Holmes insists on an apology both to Galovitch as well as himself. Prewitt, of course, will not:

“What!” Holmes said. It had not occurred to him that an EM could refuse. He was as much at a loss now as Old Ike had been before and his eyes that had become almost normal size now got wider even than before. He looked at Galovitch, as if for help, then he turned and looked at Warden behind him, then he

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<sup>89</sup> James R. Giles, *James Jones*, Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981, p. 19.

turned and looked vaguely out the corridor doorway. Corporal Paluso, a second-string Regimental tackle with a big flat murderous face that he tried to make people forget by adopting a heavy-handed bull-laughing sense of humor, and who had not missed a chance to work on Prew at drill all morning, was sitting on one of the backless chairs out on the porch and had turned and looked inside, his hard eyes in the murderous face as wide now as any of the others, as wide as Holmes's.

"Corporal Paluso," Holmes roared, in his battalion close order voice, which was the best in the Regiment.

"Yes, Sir," Paluso said, and jumped up as if stabbed.

"Take this man upstairs and have him roll a full field pack, a complete full field, extra shoes, helmet and all, and then take a bicycle and hike him up to Kolekole Pass and back. And see that he hikes all the way. And when he gets back, bring him to me." It was a pretty long speech for his battalion close order voice that had been developed more for short commands.

"Yes, Sir," Paluso said. "Come on, Prewitt."

Prew climbed down meekly off the board without a word. The Warden turned around and disgustedly went back inside. Paluso led him to the stairs and a still-shocked silence reached out after them from the corridor like a cloud.

Prew bit his lips. He got his envelope roll out of the wall locker and the combat pack off the bed foot. He laid them on the floor and opened the light pack. Everyone in the squadroom sat up and watched him silently and speculatively, as they might watch a sick horse upon whose time to die they had gotten up a pool.<sup>90</sup>

In real life, one is never told whether Jones did eventually apologize, but after not one but two hikes up Kolekole Pass, the larger than life Prewitt never did. This was just all part of "The Treatment" that Prewitt was receiving because he did not want to fight with the boxing squad, one of Captain Holmes' favorite hobbies. Both Jones and his character, Prewitt, disliked boxing, and it is not unusual that their reasons were similar. Once again, Jones takes an incident in his own life, enlarges it, makes it either more dramatic or entertaining and then has a character in *Eternity* re-enact it.

As a young adult Jones's father wanted his son to be able to take care of himself so he gave him boxing lessons. These were rough and tough lessons, without any punches being pulled, and Jones quickly found out that the best defense was to assume an aggressive manner. At the young age of thirteen he possessed an innate courage that

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<sup>90</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, pp. 279-280.

stayed with him throughout high school. In September 1935, he entered Robinson Township High School. Due his family's financial situation, he took a part time job at Si Seligman's news agency located in the courthouse square. Seligman was a boxing enthusiast and often trained boys in the back of his shop. Jones, having received lessons from his father, started attending these boxing sessions. Known as "Jeeper," he was encouraged to enter the Golden Gloves boxing tournament in Terre Haute. He won one night but lost the second night. When questioned as to what went wrong, Jones simply replied, "I didn't feel like fighting." On a return trip to Terre Haute, he reached the semifinals, but was bothered by the sight of blood. Thus ended his boxing career because he didn't like hurting people that he knew. Since boxing wasn't a recognized sport at his high school, he tried out for other sports. But he soon found out that he was not as athletically gifted as his brother so that too went by the wayside.<sup>91</sup>

Prewitt was the vehicle Jones employed to be a success—albeit temporarily—at what he chose not to pursue. Prewitt was good at boxing and had participated in the Company Smokers within the army. His decision not to box was deeply rooted and dated back to a deathbed promise he had made to his mother. Jones's own mother had died while he was stationed in Hawaii. He obviously was not close to his mother and was unable to write family members about his feelings for her. In a letter to his brother, he indicated that he had written Dad and tried to offer what little condolence he could manage. He expresses some of how he coped with the loss of his mother,

I felt so futile and helpless about it, that the only relief I got, and which kept me from going off my nut, was the taking of a three day pass, going to Honolulu, where I was alone, where no one knew or bothered me, and staying stinko for the three days. After I got back, I was disgusted and ashamed of myself, but I felt a whole lot better mentally, altho I was a helluva lot worse physically. If it's all the same to you, I'd rather just drop the subject and not refer to it in future letters.<sup>92</sup>

Jones needed an outlet—other than a three-day drunk in Honolulu—for the emotions and feelings that he felt about his mother's death. In *Eternity*, he used the death of Prewitt's

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<sup>91</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p. 14.

<sup>92</sup> Jones to Jeff Jones, 7 April 1941, p. 11.



mother to assuage his feelings of guilt. As MacShane attempts to enlighten, “she reminded him constantly of the ‘phantasmal presence of possible death.’ This nauseating memory repelled him, and in hating his memory of her, he later would blame her for his small stature, calling her ‘a fucking dwarf.’”<sup>93</sup> The news of her death would be expected to be a relief but, instead, “the turmoil he underwent on receiving the news suggests deeper worries, both about himself and about the nature of human existence.”<sup>94</sup> Another reason why a seemingly innocent death is described with such detail is that it makes readers aware of the unpredictability of human existence and sets the stage for the accidental blinding of Dixie Wells and the unwillingness for Prewitt to box.

Prewitt witnessed his mother’s death and not only is she able to extract a deathbed promise from him but in watching her death, he wondered about his own death.

“I’ll promise anything you want, ma, whatever you say for me to promise, whatever it is you say,” the boy, watching her die in front of him, looking at her above his haze of disbelief for signs of immortality, said woodenly.

“A deathbed promise is the most sacred one there is,” she hawked at him from the lungs that were almost, but not quite, filled up yet, “and I want you to make me this promise on my deathbed: Promise me you wont never hurt nobody unless its absolute a must, unless you jist have to do it.”

“I promise you,” he vowed to her, still waiting for the angels to appear. “Are you afraid?” he said.

“Give me your hand on it, boy. It is a deathbed promise, and you’ll never break it.”

“Yes maam,” he said, giving her his hand, drawing it back quickly, afraid to touch the death he saw in her, unable to find anything beautiful or edifying or spiritually uplifting in this return to God. He watched a while longer for signs of immortality. No angels came, however, there was no earthquake, no cataclysm, and it was not until he had thought it over often this first death that he had had a part in that he discovered the single uplifting thing about it, that being the fact that in this last great period of fear her thought had been upon his future, rather than her own. He wondered often after that about his own death, how it would come, how it would feel, what it would be like to know that this breath, now, was the last one. It was hard to accept that he, who was the hub of this known universe, would cease to exist, but it was an inevitability and he did not shun it. He only hoped that he would meet it with the same magnificent indifference with wish she who had been his mother met it. Because it was there, he felt, that the immortality he had not seen was hidden.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p. 34.

<sup>94</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p. 34.

<sup>95</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, pp. 18-19.

At the time, Prewitt was not aware of just how painful that deathbed promise would become as he entered the army and “The Treatment.” But before he gets the full treatment from the Holmes and Warden duo, Prewitt has a small taste of success as well as the importance of the boxing program when men are waiting for the “war” to happen. The episode with Dixie Wells cannot be handled with magnificent indifference and becomes just one of the reasons he requested a transfer.

Prewitt left Fort Myer and arrived at Schofield Barracks still bitter about being passed over for the top bugler’s position. He went back to fighting in what he considered the Pineapple Army, where fighting was more profuse and was considered the true measure of a man than at Myer. He got a corporalcy for winning the Company Smoker championship of the 27<sup>th</sup> and he continued on to become the runner-up in the welterweight division and Schofield Class I. Since he was predicted to be the surefire winner the next year, he was promoted to sergeant. This would have gone on indefinitely if by fate Dixie Wells had not crossed in his path. Life’s absurdity found the off season the perfect time to place this incident, life’s irony was that Prewitt had finally convinced himself that bugling wasn’t everything. He was on the jockstrap gravytrain that Maggio held in such disrepute. But life’s absurdities, via Jones’s creation, always take precedence when it deals with messing with people’s heads.

Dixie Wells was a middleweight who loved boxing and lived for boxing. He had enlisted because business was not so good for fighters during the Depression, and because he wanted time to mature his style and season without being overmatched in some ham andegger, and without having to live on the beans a ham andegger has to eat while he is trying to work up to the big time. He planned to come out of the Army and go right into the upper brackets. A lot of people on the Outside had their eye on him and he was already having fights downtown in Honolulu at the Civic Auditorium.

Dixie liked to work with Prewitt because of the other’s speed and Prewitt learned a lot from Dixie. They worked together often. Dixie was a heavy middle, but then Prewitt was a heavy welter. They are very professional about those things in the Army; they keep every pound that they can squeeze; they always figure a man for ten pounds more than what he weighs in at when they match him; they dry him out and then after he has weighed in they feed him steak and lots of water.

It was Dixie who asked him to work this time, because he had a fight coming up downtown. Also, it was Dixie who wanted to use the six ounce gloves, and they never wore headgear anyway.

Things like that happen more often than anyone suspects. Prew knew that, and there was no reason why he should feel guilty.<sup>96</sup>

But Jones trying to see what the peacetime army does to men's heads, of course makes an everyday event larger than life. He is simply describing the event quite innocently:

Prew was set, flat on his feet when he caught Dixie wide with this no more than ordinarily solid cross. Dixie just happened to be standing solid too. Maybe he had heard something. From the way he fell, dead weight, a falling ingot or sack of meal dropped from the haymow that shudders the barn and bursts its own seams, Prew knew. Dixie lit square on his face and did not roll over. Fighters do not light on their faces any more than judo men. Prew jerked back his hand and stared at it, like a kid who touched the stove. Then he went downstairs to get the Doc.

Dixie Wells was in a coma for a week but he finally came out of it. The only thing was that he was blind.....Dixie did not hate him, nor was he bitter, he was just unhappy...It would probably, after Dixie Wells, have been the same whether or not he had been haunted by his promise to his mother. But the old, ingenuous, Baptist-like promise was the clincher. Because the uninitiated boy had taken it, not like a Baptist, but literally.<sup>97</sup>

Prewitt, in unthinking honesty, immediately informed the higher ups of his decision to quit the boxing, much to their disbelief. He was not smart enough to sit back and wait until the season started to let them know. Their reaction would later be considered humane and childlike compared to "The Treatment" he received after he transferred.

At first when he told them why he was quitting they would not believe him. Then, later when they saw that it was true, they decided he had only been in the sport for what he could get out of it and did not love it like they did, and with righteous indignation had him busted. Then, still later, when he did not come around, they really did not understand it. They began to build him up then, they began to heckle him, they called him in and talked to him man to man, told him how good he was, explained what hope we have in you and are you going to let us down, enumerated what he owed the regiment, showed him how he ought to be ashamed. It was then they really began not to let him alone. And it was then he transferred.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, pp. 21-22.

<sup>97</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>98</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 24.

He was transferred to Dynamite Holmes's division, where readers cannot be so naïve as to believe that Holmes, as well as Warden, had been fully apprised of Prewitt's prowess at boxing. Instead they played innocent, and let him assume that the ease with which he was transferred was because of his bugling. After all, "they had really, truly, wanted a good bugler there."<sup>99</sup> This transfer would ultimately cost him his life as he became "the small man standing on the edge of the ocean shaking his fist, the magnificent gesture...Almost a criminal, almost an artist, but not either...."<sup>100</sup> Prewitt's dual problem of being wounded and a murderer caused him to go "absent without leave," while Jones' ankle injury or his overwhelming need to write would cause him to go AWOL as well.

Prewitt was the first of the pair to go AWOL, and he managed to do so before the attack on Pearl Harbor. As one will see later, Jones was not that lucky, but both of them were disillusioned about their Army lives and the people that surrounded them. It would be an understatement to say that Prewitt did not like Sgt. Judson (known as Fatso—with good reason—to his close friends or enemies, either of which appeared equal in importance if not sheer numbers). Prewitt disliked Fatso so much that he honestly appeared surprised when Sgt. Judson expresses surprise at being stabbed,

"You've killed me. Why'd you want to kill me," he said, and died. The expression of hurt surprise and wounded reproach and sheer inability to understand stayed on his face like a forgotten suitcase left at the station, and gradually hardened there. Prew stood looking down at him, still shocked by the reproving question.<sup>101</sup>

With the unclaimed baggage left at the station, Prewitt realized it was hopeless to even think about going back to Schofield. The cut on his side would eventually lead to questions, especially after they had discovered Fatso's dead body. His only thought was to get to Alma's. "He had not even considered the possibility of getting cut up so bad he could not go back to the Post. Any fool ought to have thought of that...But if he could get to Alma's he would be all right."<sup>102</sup> It appeared that his best laid plans, with the best of intentions that Prewitt had ever actually felt good about were going awry. His own thoughts were, "you're really over the hill for good, this time, Prewitt. Your days as a

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<sup>99</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 24.

<sup>100</sup> Loyal Jones, "James Jones' Appalachian Soldier in His World War II Trilogy." *Journal of the Appalachian Studies Association*, vol. 3, 1991.

<sup>101</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 666.

thirty-year man are over,” and as he struggled with the essence of life, “Complicated. Very complicated. Why was it everything was always so goddam complicated? Even the simplest things was so goddam complicated when you come to doing them.”<sup>103</sup> Things were not working the way he wanted because deep in his heart he wanted to be the “good” soldier like Warden. By his own thoughts, “he hadnt meant to go over the hill and some up here tonight. He had meant to go right back to Post. That was what he had meant to do.”<sup>104</sup>

Jones’s ankle, a non-combat injury, was operated on at a naval base hospital in the New Hebrides. He was returned to the United States by hospital ship and then had a short stay at Letterman General Hospital in San Francisco. He was later sent to Kennedy General Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee. It was during his stay in Memphis that he came to know the Peabody Hotel and gathered information for his later writings. “It was a wild time then,” Jones wrote; he drank heavily and began to pick fights in the local bars. His ankle was still giving him trouble. He was told by the hospital review board that he was considered ill-suited “for full infantry duty.” The review board wanted to know if he wanted a discharge or a reassignment to “Limited Duty on a job of training new men.” It was a bit surprising that with his love/hate relationship with the army that he opted for limited duty. Typical of bureaucratic snafus, his papers returned and he was “assigned back to full Infantry duty—and with the Yankee Division (National Guard) then at Camp Campbell. This unit was preparing to leave for Europe and the D Day invasion that was expected. Jones was denied a furlough to visit what was left of his family, so in November 1943, he went AWOL and took a train to Robinson. When he returned, he was not court-martialed because a warrant officer befriended him and marked his papers with a “two week delay in route.” In *Eternity*, Warden does the same for Prewitt by protecting him from court martial proceedings. “Jones was then sent on maneuvers that lasted four weeks. He was still angry about being returned to active duty, and he had continued pain in his ankle. Again, he went AWOL.” He was not as lucky

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<sup>102</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 667.

<sup>103</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, pp. 668-669.

<sup>104</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 671.

upon his return as he was reduced in rank to private and assigned to the quartermaster gas and supply company, which appeared to have all of the washouts of the army.<sup>105</sup> The time that both Prewitt and Jones spent was not totally wasted. Jones was introduced to Lowney Handy, a key influence in his later writing. Prewitt was introduced to some of the greatest literary works and became an obsessive reader.

It kept coming into Prewitt's mind more and more frequently how he was not a thirty-year man any more. He went on a reading jag. It was the second real reading jag in his life. The first had been when he was laid up in the hospital at Myer getting over the clap that the rich girl had given him.

It seemed to ease his irritability and even some of the worst literature was appealing. He attempted to read every book in the apartment:

...even the bad ones that did not sound true to life, at least not as he had become acquainted with life. But he was willing to give them the benefit of the doubt since obviously he had not know every kind of life (like, the life of the rich, say) and anyway, if you just shut off part of your mind from asking acerbic questions about this and that and limited yourself to just the words you read in through your eyes, you could almost believe all of them, even the worst ones.

One can see elements of Jones personality appearing in Prewitt and his choice of reading material. This is foretelling in that Jones felt that he would not be able to accomplish everything he wanted and Prewitt saw the futility of even trying:

He did the same thing with a Thomas Wolfe book that Alma brought home on a hunch, writing them down in his notebook as he came on them. But when he had finished that one he found he had so many titles of books he wanted to read that it would take him at least a year of doing absolutely nothing but reading just to get through them.

It was partly that, the hopelessness of ever reading all of them, that brought the reading jag to an end.

The other thing that helped to end it and break it off short was Alma.

She got up early one morning and cornered him in the kitchen before Georgette was up. He was reading another Thomas Wolfe book, the one where the kid went to New York to become a great writer. He never did get to finish it to find out what happened to him.<sup>106</sup>

Prewitt realized, much as Jones did, that he had to try to get back to Schofield and face the music. His plan was to attempt to get back in during the chaos resulting from the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. Prewitt's decision to return would be a fatal one; Jones'

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<sup>105</sup> Hendrick, *To Reach Eternity*, pp. 36-38

return simply resulted in a reduction in rank. Prewitt's personality echoes Jones's, he was exposed to reading while in the Army, but more importantly this character allowed Jones to vicariously participate in all the delights that peacetime Hawaii had to offer.

Jones pictured himself going through "years of agony and blackest despair, trying to be a successful writer."<sup>107</sup> He was determined to sacrifice love until he was considered a success, or at least published. He supplies readers with the exploits and sexual enjoyment through the characters that one finds in *Eternity*. One is given another literary trip to Honolulu where the blocks formed by:

King Street, Hotel Street, and other byways of the neighborhood were full of pawnshops, fish markets, and Chinese grocery shops, where the whole carcasses of smoked pigs and ducks hung in rows on meathooks. They also contained bars, tattoo parlors, and photo galleries. Over such shops, on upper floors reached by long narrow staircases, were the whorehouses. They were disguised as hotels and bore names like the New Senator, the Western, and the Archer.

These were the "real" places in Honolulu, Jones simply added the Mrs. Kipfer and the New Congress, the place where Prewitt would meet and fall in love, an unusual thing for a soldier. As MacShane points out the dramatic contrast between Jones's social life and the soldiers—that became characters in *Eternity*—he was surrounded by:

Usually Jones went into Honolulu alone, but sometimes a friend like Everest Capra accompanied him. After stopping at a bar they would go to Wu Fat's Chinese restaurant on the corner of Maunakea and Hotel Street...sometimes, business at the whorehouses was so heavy that lines of soldiers would stretch into the streets outside, waiting to enter. These places made no pretense of providing night club entertainment. They simply contained rows of small rooms or cubicles that were available for a few minutes of quick intercourse. A white girl cost \$3. Across the canal that runs along Front Street were native girls; they cost \$2 each.

Mac Shane continued with the real reason why Jones went to these places, his response, as his reasons for not actively participating:

Along with his friend, Jones would wait in line outside the whorehouse, but they rarely went in. Once they reached the doorway and met the girls, they turned and ran down the stairs, tumbling over each other to get away. They were shy and nervous, but they were also afraid of catching a venereal disease.

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<sup>106</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, pp. 715-717.

<sup>107</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p. 35.

This is not totally unbelievable because Jones had a scare with venereal disease early in his enlistment. One can see Jones used the experience to observe the people around him, but he could not help but end up in the masculine mode of boasting:

Later, with his friend John Cloniger from Schofield Barracks, Jones would go into the whorehouses to drink and dance with the girls. He liked to talk to them and find out about their lives, but if they suggested making love, he would make excuses and eventually leave. Afterward, he and his friend would go to one of the bars and have some drinks, and on the way back to the post, sharing a taxi with some other soldiers, they would boast of their conquests. In letters home to his brother, Jones also bragged about his successes with women, referring casually to 'the cupcake' whose favors he received.<sup>108</sup>

As is customary for Jones to do, these emotions appeared in *Eternity* in an attempt to either vindicate or at least understand the feelings and frustrations of peacetime soldiers. This was also an attempt to deal with his feelings of the tightening confines of army life. He wrote to Virginia Moore, the girl he met on the bus in California (prior to leaving for Hawaii), that his observation of the soldier was he:

lives alone with other men, who are suspicious and grasping and afraid of each other and themselves. He longs for a woman upon whose breast he may lay his head and weep, a woman who will understand, who will love, who will believe. And he cannot find one. He is lost. He becomes frantic. His entrails quake with sickness at the things around him. Uniforms! Uniforms! All he can see or smell is uniforms, a pounding, roaring sea of uniforms, and here and there he sees a barren, desert isle: a snobbish, egotistic officer with his lovely wife, and he longs to have a woman he may hold, who will love him.<sup>109</sup>

Since Jones will not be able to be totally satisfied with his army life, he reacts in the only way he knows, he gets drunks and eventually admits his lies to his brother. The love that he saw in Hawaii was so matter of fact that he felt that his brother expected to hear more of the exotic world, so he embellished, only later to recant:

I used to tell you about all the women I'd slept with, how I slept with...with..., and that each taught me a little toward being a writer. Did I ever tell you about the Portagee gal I had in Honolulu? shacked up with her? Ive told most everybody else at some time or other. It like the others was a lie. It was an attempt to make a hero out of myself. It was a very swashbuckling picture, romantic, heart-stirring; pretty, but untrue and in being untrue creating a false conception of a soldier, adventurer. I think it always thrilled you, made you want

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<sup>108</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, pp 35-36.

<sup>109</sup> Jones to Virginia Moore undated. James Jones Papers, Collection of American Literature, the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.



in some way to play the role yourself. There is no answer in playing roles. There is no answer in the Magnificent Gesture, only pathos; and pathos is no answer.<sup>110</sup>

While there is some question of the Magnificent Gesture, the commiseration is about to become a reality as *Eternity* climaxes with the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. As Maggio warned us, “theys a war goin on here.”

Jones comes to the full realization of himself as well as history. Milton Anthony Warden becomes the avenue for Jones to retell his own actual experience during the Pearl Harbor attack. He cannot use Prewitt because he is AWOL when the attack occurs, Maggio and Bloom are dead, no one knows where Slade is—in all probability still over at Hickam Field—and as one can see, Colonel Delbert’s dog isn’t likely to be a reliable source. So it is left up to First Sergeant Warden to play the part of Jones:

It was a typical Sunday morning breakfast, for the first weekend after payday. At least a third of the Company was not home. Another third was still in bed asleep. But the last third more than made up for the absences in the loudness of their drunken laughter and horseplay and the clashing of cutlery and halfpint milk bottles.

Warden was just going back for seconds on both hotcakes and eggs, with that voracious appetite he always had when he was drunk, when this blast shuddered by under the floor and rattled the cups on the tables and then rolled on off across the quad like a high wave at sea in a storm.

He stopped in the doorway of the KP room and looked back at the messhall. He remembered the picture the rest of his life. It had become very quiet and everybody had stopped eating and looked up at each other.

“Must be doin some dynamitin down to Wheeler Field,” somebody said tentatively.

“I heard they was clearing some ground for a new fighter strip,” somebody else agreed.

That seemed to satisfy everybody. They went back to their eating. Warden heard a laugh ring out above the hungry gnashings of cutlery on china, as he turned back to the KP room. The tail of the chow line was still moving past the two griddles, and he made a mental note to go behind the cooks’ serving table when he bucked the line this time, so as not to make it so obvious.

That was when the second blast came. He could hear it a long way off coming toward them under the ground; then it was there before he could move, rattling the cups and plates in the KP sinks and the rinsing racks; then it was gone and he could hear it going away northeast toward the 21<sup>st</sup> Infantry’s football field. Both the KPs were looking at him.

He reached out to put his plate on the nearest flat surface, holding it carefully in both hands so it would not get broken while he congratulated himself

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<sup>110</sup> Jones to Jeff Jones, December 1946, p. 82.

on his presence of mind, and then turned back to the messhall, the KPs still watching him.

As there was nothing under the plate, it fell on the floor and crashed in the silence, but nobody heard it because the third groundswell of blast had already reached the PX and was just about to them. It passed under, rattling everything, just as he got back to the NCOs' table.

"This is it," somebody said quite simply.<sup>111</sup>

At this point, as with his other characters, Jones and Warden's path diverge. This is the scene in *Eternity* that was truly the real experience that Jones had in Hawaii. He told and retold that story literally to anyone who would listen. Life, as Jones has informed us, is not without its ironies. One of which is that Jones would have been at Wheeler Field—the main place of the attack—had he not transferred to the Infantry. Another is that readers see the fictional Warden arming up and heading to the roof to shoot at the attacking planes. Jones, on the other hand, reports immediately for duty at the headquarters building and took up his position at a desk outside the colonel's office. While Warden is hopelessly trying to fend off an attack, Jones is carrying messages for bewildered officers. He is armed in his own way, though. He carried with him not only the special pistol that went with his job, but also the memories that would become a source for further exploration in his writing. Jones found time to take a personal inventory and he remembered:

thinking with a sense of profoundest awe that none of our lives would ever be the same, that a social, even a cultural watershed had been crossed which we could never go back over, and I wondered how many of us would survive to see the end results. I wondered if I would. I had just turned twenty, the month before.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, pp.735-736.

<sup>112</sup> MacShane, *Into Eternity*, p 40.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

Reading about that crazy boy and his crazy family and his drunken father and his miserly mother is so like myself and my own family that I discovered I'd been a writer all along without having realized it.<sup>113</sup>

Jones's passionate desire to be a writer originated during his army years. His obsession with reading of a wide range of authors from Ernest Hemingway to Thomas Wolfe exposed him to what he believed was good writing. The fact that he pursued his passion and did become a very good American writer simply affirms the premise that not only are we what we read, but also what we write. This is indeed the case with Jones's *From Here to Eternity*. When Jones was asked why he wanted to write, he candidly replied, "well, I suppose you could say that I want to impose my personality upon the world."<sup>114</sup>

This was all too apparent in *Eternity* as he created fictional characters who paralleled those he encountered during his army years. This imposition of his personal experience appeared as an emotional honesty exhibited in Jones's writing. The Schofield Barracks, a real place, belonged to him as he described in great detail the routine, as well as the geography that surrounded it. As Joan Didion expressed in her article, "Good-bye, gentleman ranker:"

Certain places seem to exist mainly because someone has written about them. Kilimanjaro belongs to Ernest Hemingway, Oxford, Mississippi, belongs to William Faulkner, and one hot July week in Oxford I was moved to spend an afternoon walking the graveyard looking for his stone, a kind of courtesy call on the owner of the property. A place belongs forever to whoever claims it hardest, remembers it most obsessively, wrenches it from itself, shapes its, loves it so radically that he remakes it in his image, and not only Schofield Barracks but a great deal of Honolulu itself has always belonged for me to James Jones.<sup>115</sup>

Without a doubt, Jones infused his own personality and experience into this novel. Other writers have great respect for his work, focusing on two things. First, in "understanding

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<sup>113</sup> Jones, interview with Willie Morris as cited in James R. Giles, *James Jones*, p. 20.

<sup>114</sup> Quoted in Nelson W. Aldrich, Jr. "The Art of Fiction XXIII: James Jones." *The Paris Review* 20 (Autumn-Winter 1958-1959), p. 55.

<sup>115</sup> Didion, "Good-bye, gentleman ranker," p. 50.

that an artist discovers in the intensity of his personal experience ‘great simple truths’ and gives them universal meaning.” This is obvious in Jones’s writing, as he constantly struggled to convince readers that it was the truth that he wrote, albeit under the guise of fiction. The second important component in the respect his fellow writers was “their appreciation for the struggle implicit in maintaining the uncompromising honesty found in all of James Jones’s work.”<sup>116</sup>

Even as he spoke of his work, Jones understood that the quality that makes a man want to write and be read was “essentially a desire for self-exposure and is masochistic.”<sup>117</sup> Jones’s tendency to stand behind his strong beliefs is reiterated in his 1957 letter to Mack Morriss, an attempt to aid Morris in his own writing. Jones felt Morriss had sort of a psychological block, of

not wanting to look deeply enough into yourself to get at the very basic truth. One has to have that sort of peculiar compulsion, a certain masochism, to want—and need—to do that and then expose it in writing.<sup>118</sup>

If Jones had any similar psychological block, it certainly was not evident in *Eternity*. This novel was written to allow him to purge himself of his own experience and allow readers to see the souls of his fellow soldiers, as well as his own.

Although *From Here to Eternity* was indeed only the first part of a trilogy of World War II, it exhibited characteristics that broke the standard for works that anticipated a sequel. Jones intended for each of the novels to stand alone and be given merit for its own individuality.<sup>119</sup> Yet with its truthfulness of characters, *Eternity* was the only World War II novel “written by someone who served in the peacetime U. S. Army and personally witnessed the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.”<sup>120</sup> The two other works would reflect the remainder of his wartime experience. Indeed, Jones believed his completed trilogy would say “just about everything I have ever had to say, or will ever

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<sup>116</sup> Giles, *James Jones*, p. 205.

<sup>117</sup> Aldrich, “The Art of Fiction,” p. 55.

<sup>118</sup> Jones to Mack Morriss, 12 November 1957.

<sup>119</sup> Jones as cited in *The James Jones Reader*, edited by James R. Giles and J. Michael Lennon, p. 23.

<sup>120</sup> James Jones, *The James Jones Reader: Outstanding Selections from his War Writings including From Here to Eternity, The Thin Red Line, and Whistle*. James R. Giles and J. Michael Lennon, editors. (New York: Carol Publishing Group, 1991), p. 14.

have to say, on the human condition of war and what it means to us, as against what we claim it means to us.”<sup>121</sup>

But Jones also had a wider expectation of his work. As is frequently the case in *From Here to Eternity*, Jones has one of his characters express the reality of his experience, and in one case, at least, of his writer’s expectations. Jones has the helpful soldier Weary picking up Prewitt and Warden, having found them drunk in the middle of the road, depositing them in his truck. Then Weary simply “shook his head and put the tailgate up and drove off down the gravel toward the bivouac, carrying two drunks, who both fatuously drunkenly imagined, that once in a dream somewhere, sometime, someplace, they had managed for a moment to touch another human soul and understand it.”<sup>122</sup>

This, for Jones, was the essence of a writer’s ambition. As it was for his friend and fellow American exile in Paris, William Styron, who wrote, “the times get precisely the literature they deserve, and...if the writing...is gloomy the gloom is not so much inherent in the literature as in the times.” Styron reflected further, and continued; if the writer “does not think one way or another,...he can create literature worthy of himself and of his place, at this particular moment in history.”<sup>123</sup> For Jones, the goal was simple. “I write,” he said quietly, “to reach eternity.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Jones, *Outstanding Selections*, 25.

<sup>122</sup> Jones, *Eternity*, p. 479.

<sup>123</sup> William Styron, “Letter to an Editor,” *The Paris Review* 1 (Summer 1953), p. 9.

<sup>124</sup> “From Eternity to Here,” *Newsweek* (13 January 1958), p. 90.

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